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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000354

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KISL](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BG](#) [JI](#) [BGD](#)

SUBJECT: JAMAAT ISLAMI LEADER DISCUSSES POLITICS

Classified By: A/DCM D.C. McCullough, Reason(s): 1.4 (b)

1. (C) Summary: On January 19, Poloff met Jamaat Islami Assistant Secretary General Abdul Quader Molla in his JI offices. Molla predicted that the AL would join the election, and said JI would welcome Ershad's party to the BNP/JI alliance. He saw no long-term fallout from JMB's attacks on JI's popularity, and dismissed reports that BNP protected JMB. He welcomed improved relations between his party and the USG. End summary.

ELECTIONS
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2. (C) Asked if JI will ask for more seats in the next election, Molla smiled and said, "It would be decided by the four parties" after April. He said that politically the BNP and JI are in a transitional period. (Note: This may refer to the aging leadership of the two parties.) Describing it as a bargaining situation, he said that the bigger partner always opens with less at first and it, s up to the smaller partner to make the larger concession. When pressed, Molla threw out a number of 30 seats, up from their current 16, but was non-committal on how many seats JI might demand.

3. (C) If Ershad's Jatiya party joins the BNP/JI coalition, "it will be different," he said. JI would sacrifice seats for unity. He said that Ershad has a number of demands for joining, and some are "close" to our position, such as keeping Islam as the state religion. He said that it would be better to have Ershad in a BNP-JI alliance because "it would be easier to administer the nation" if the AL were isolated in opposition and therefore less prone to violence. We are a poor nation, he said, and "can't afford the destruction of all of those vehicles from the strikes."

4. (C) Molla said that the AL will join the elections and discounted their threat to boycott as posturing. (Note: Another JI official told us previously that grassroots AL officials in many localities are clearly preparing for an election battle.) He said that JI "recognized our mistakes" with boycotts and "we have changed."

JMB
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5. (C) Molla said that the militant Jamaatul Mujahedin Bangladesh (JMB) are isolated from the people, and drew on a Mao Tse Tung's analogy to insist that JMB "cannot survive in the current sea." He said the bombers had to leave their home areas to bomb another area; for example, the bomber who attacked the judges in Jalakanthi came from Rajshahi.

6. (C) JI has not been weakened by the association with JMB, he said. While some JMB members had associations with JI, particularly the student wing, he said that by their own admission JMB members left as they disagreed with the JI stance on adhering to the democratic process. JMB is not gone but certainly their activities have decreased, but splinter groups might arise and make future attacks. In response to a question about the role of madrassahs in JMB activities, he said that the "common madrassah" is not involved in supporting or acting as terrorist safehavens or planning sites. He said that the JMB people are not educated and therefore can't last.

7. (C) Molla dismissed notions that the BNP government was protecting JMB people. "It, s a political campaign saying that Abdur Rahman is being protected." He cited statements of Mufti Hannan being protected by BNP as a "drama" saying that Hannan was on the loose under the AL government, so they must have been protecting him too. Asked who might be supporting JMB, he said that their explosives have come from India, and it has been long known that India desires to control the markets of Bangladesh. India, he added, says that Bangladesh threatens the stability of all neighboring states to justify its hostility to Bangladesh.

U.S.- BANGLADESH RELATIONS
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8. (C) Molla appreciated the dialogue between his party and the US, and wanted to close the distance between Americans and Islam. Molla told poloff that he took exception to a recent speech by Secretary Rice, whom he quoted as saying that Afghanistan is a headache for Pakistan, and the "rest of

South Asia is the headache of India, and they should solve it." He said that statements like this give India carte blanche to deal with Bangladesh in harsh ways. He said that the Bangladeshi people are not ready to surrender to the "Mogul Empire of India," and asked for deeper bilateral ties with the US, "Why should we not have the same bilateral relations with the U.S. that Pakistan does?"

19. (SBU) BIO NOTE: In 1998, Molla had a heart by-pass operation in Riyadh. He is a diabetic.
CHAMMAS